



HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

M. S. Montgomery
Fire Marshal

January 27, 2003

To: Property Managers/Property Owners
Subject: **New Requirements for Multi-Unit Housing Projects
(Gated Apartment, Town Home or Condominium)**

Dear Manager/Owner:

This letter is to advise you of the Harris County Commissioners Court Order regulating gated and non-gated multi-unit housing projects in the unincorporated areas of Harris County. **The order affects all facilities (condominiums, town homes, and apartments) that have more than one building GATED OR NOT, as the regulation also requires all multi-unit structures depict the number of units in each building. This regulation also includes gated subdivisions/communities.** A copy of the signed order, definitions and standards is attached. Please read it carefully.

In addition to this mail-out, we have established a section on our website (noted below) to answer questions regarding requirements, application and the inspection process. The section provides information and pictures illustrating proper access gates, driveways and building unit signage. Our office will begin inspecting multi-unit housing facilities upon receipt of your application at a one-time cost of \$50 per property. All projects must be in compliance of the gate access and/or the building unit identification by October 1, 2003.

The Harris County Fire Marshal's Office has adopted the KNOX Company locks as the standard meeting all requirements for secured access gates. Keys for these locks will be issued to the fire department and EMS in whose district your property is located. Selected law enforcement patrol personnel will be issued keys at a later date. All secured access gates will require the use of a KNOX device, which your property must purchase and to which only emergency services personnel have keys. (Questions regarding KNOX devices are accessible via a toll-free number, 1-800-552-5669 or ordering online at www.knoxbox.com.) This will entail changing out existing generic locks or existing KNOX locks. Only KNOX locks at multi-unit housing projects throughout the county will be master-keyed alike affording access to mutual aid agencies. Each gated facility must also provide at least one driveway entrance, not necessarily the main one, meeting the access needs for emergency apparatus.

Most access gate companies are familiar with these types of locks and can provide installation or retrofitting service. An access gate company should be consulted before ordering any type of lock device for your specific property.

Having reviewed these documents, please provide and forward the required information.
Should you have any questions, feel free to contact our office.

Sincerely,

M. S. Montgomery
Fire Marshal

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following answers address some of the frequently asked questions regarding Harris County regulations of gated and non-gated multi-unit housing projects and gated subdivisions/communities in the unincorporated areas of Harris County. For a detailed explanation of all the requirements, standards and procedures, refer to the information packet that has been mailed to the project or on the Harris County website www.hcfmo.net. If your project did not receive such a packet, please contact our office at 281-436-8011 and one will be mailed to you.

GENERAL

Q: What authority does Commissioners Court have to require standards regarding emergency vehicle access to and building identification of multi-unit housing (apartment, town home and condominium) projects, gated subdivisions and communities?

A: Local Government Code Sections 352.111 thru 352.120 allow commissioners court of a county to adopt regulations and set standards regarding vehicular or pedestrian gates and building identification. Those projects required to comply shall be inspected and approved by the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office.

Q: How do I schedule an inspection?

A: Install the required signs and protected switches as noted in the information packet. Complete the required documentation described in the information packet. Mail or deliver the documentation to the Fire Marshal's office along with the inspection fee. An inspector will call you within 15 working days to schedule an inspection of the project.

Q: What is the cost for the inspection?

A: \$50 payable by **cash, cashiers check or money order. No company or personal checks.**

Q: If the project does not pass the inspection initially, can it be re-inspected?

A: Yes. The cost is \$25 and payable in the same manner. If the project still does not pass inspection, a Fire Marshal's Order may be issued - a violation of which is a Class B Misdemeanor with a maximum fine of \$1500.

Q: Are any projects grandfathered under the code?

A: No. All existing and newly constructed projects must comply by October 1, 2003.

GATES & DRIVEWAYS

Q: If the project does not have access gates, does it still have to be inspected?

A: Yes. The regulations regarding building unit number/letter signage still apply. The costs and penalties are the same. (Refer to the section on **Building Identification**)

Q: What are the gate requirements?

A: At least one gated entrance meeting the standards is required. The minimum width of the vehicular gate must be a 14-foot clear opening width. The driveway must be a minimum of 28 feet wide to allow for entrance and egress. This entry must be free and

clear of obstructions, which may entail the repositioning of card readers, telephone entry devices or remote control devices. Such equipment may be installed within the curbside area. If a concrete island, where a reader or entry device is located, separates the 28-foot driveway, a 13-foot clearance in both directions is permissible. All vehicular gates are required to have emergency vehicle accessibility. It is required to install a Knox locking device for emergency vehicle access to all vehicular gates. Accessibility can be achieved by an electronic switch inside a 911 box and box is locked w/Knox lock, a Knox key switch, or 911 Box that contain keys to a manager's locks and is locked w/Knox lock.

Q: What about pedestrian gates that control access to a building?

A: This type of gate must also afford emergency personnel ready access to all units in each building. (Refer to the section on **Emergency Access Activation Point & Locks**)

Q: What are the requirements for pedestrian gate accessibility?

A: Only one (1) existing pedestrian gate which is nearby or in the vicinity of a vehicular gate is required to have a Knox locking device for emergency access.

Q: If the project wishes to have new gates installed or needs to have existing gate(s) altered to meet the requirements, can you recommend a gate company?

A: No. The property owner should be familiar with the gate company that installed the existing gates. If not, several gate companies with expertise in this area are listed in the phone book. Apartment association groups may be able to recommend a gate company.

Q: How far from the roadway do the gates have to be located?

A: The distance from the road to the gates shall be no less than 30 feet. This allows for sufficient turn radii and protection for emergency vehicles from roadway traffic.

EMERGENCY ACCESS ACTIVATION POINT (EAAP) & LOCKS

Q: What is an EAAP?

A: This is a protected switch approved by the Fire Marshal in the form of a key switch, padlock or lock box. It is in a designated location and readily available to emergency response personnel. It shall not exceed 5 feet in height and must be easily accessible from outside the vehicle or pedestrian access gate.

Q: Are all locked access gates required to have a Fire Marshal's approved protected switch?

A: Yes, as emergency personnel may need to access the property from more than one gated location.

Q: What if my project already has padlocks, key switches or lock boxes on the access gates? And some of these locks are KNOX locks.

A: All existing padlocks and key switches must be changed out to afford access to emergency response personnel countywide. Existing boxes secured with a padlock only need not be changed. The padlock securing the box, however, must be changed.

Q: How much do these key switches, padlocks or lock boxes cost?

A: Protected switches must be purchased from the KNOX Company only. The company can be reached at 1-800-552-5669 or online at www.knoxbox.com/store. Prices range from \$79-\$85 for padlocks or key switches and \$180-\$310 for lock boxes. Shipping and handling is extra.

Q: How do I order these key switches, padlocks, lock boxes and who installs them?

A: KNOX BOX forms can be obtained from the Fire Marshal's office by phone, fax, in person or you may order products on-line at www.knoxbox.com. Select On-Line Purchase, enter your zip code, select Harris Co Fire Marshal Office as your dept/Fire department. Proceed to order your Knox locking devices. Prior to ordering, you may want to contact an access gate company before ordering any device to ensure proper installation. After placing the order, the protected switch(es) should arrive in 2-3 weeks. Lock boxes and key switches will require professional gate company installation. After the boxes or switches are mounted, contact your local volunteer fire department. Fire department personnel will make arrangements to meet you at the project and secure-lock the boxes, key switches and any of the required padlocks.

Q: Who will have keys to these locks?

A: Initially, only firefighters and emergency medical personnel responding to calls for service will have key access. No keys will be provided to access gate companies, project personnel or property owners. Selected law enforcement patrol personnel will be issued keys at a later date. Keys will be issued through a key coordinator with the Fire Marshal's office only and a strict accountability program will be enforced.

BUILDING IDENTIFICATION

Q: What type of signage for each building is required?

A: The sign must display the individual number/letter of the building and the range of unit numbers within the respective building. It must be easily visible from the vehicular driving areas on the project. There is no required sign size but the letters and/or numbers must be at least four inches high and in a contrasting color compared to the building.

Q: Do the signs have to be replaced if the buildings already have numbers/letters showing what unit numbers are in each building?

A: No, not if the signs meet the criteria as mentioned above.

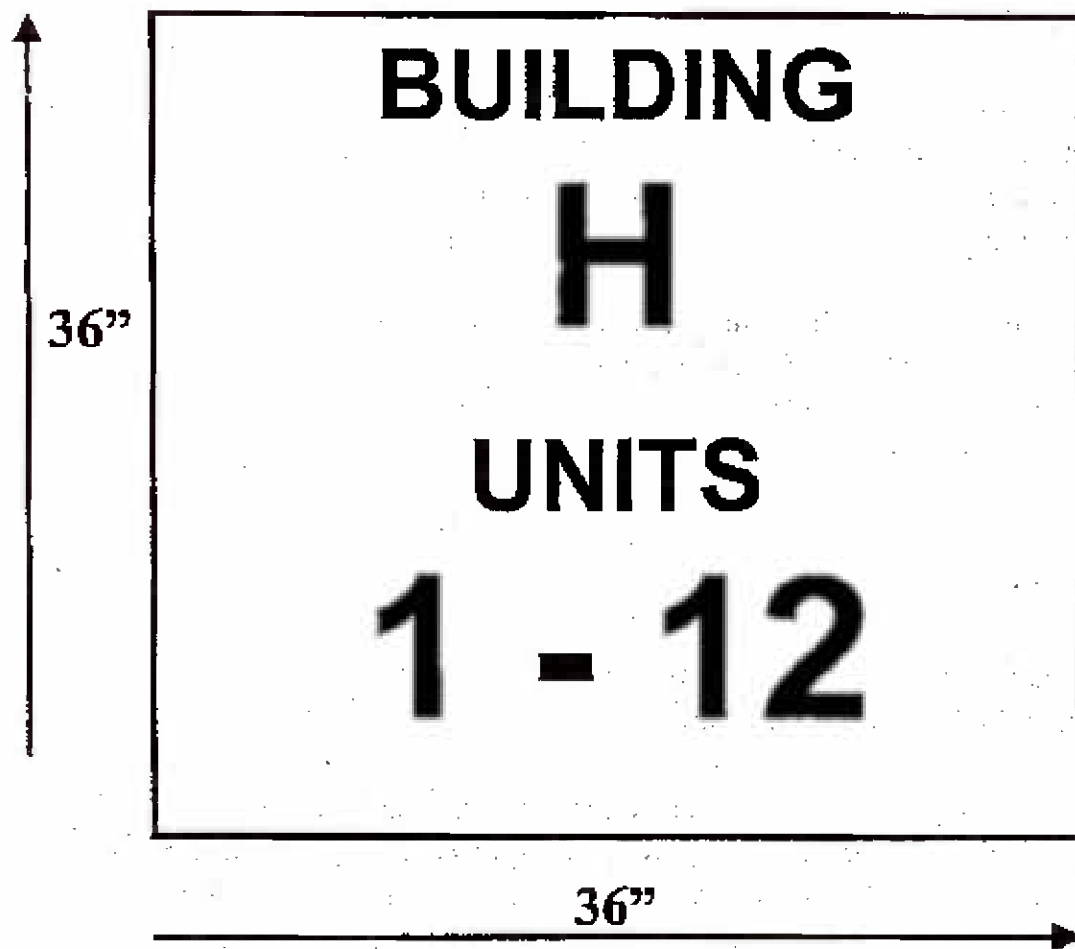
Q: Any other signage recommendations?

A: Yes. The signs should be of weather-resistive material and placed at either the ends or corners of the buildings, as long as they are visible from driving areas. A black background with white, light reflective letters is easily seen in low-light conditions.

C. Building Identification

Emergency response agencies must be able to view and identify specific buildings and unit numbers under daylight, night, and inclement weather conditions. It is recommended that lighted signs be considered for viewing in low light conditions. The Fire Marshal's Office is the final authority on the approval of building identification signs.

1. Each residential building in a multi-unit housing project will have a sign depicting the number or letter of the respective building in a contrasting color compared to the building. Recommended colors are white, light-reflective letters/numbers on a black background to enhance visibility.
2. Each identification sign shall depict the individual unit number and/or letter, or the range of unit numbers or letters, within the respective building.
3. Each identification sign shall be easily seen from the vehicular driving areas by a responding emergency agency.
4. As a recommendation, each identification sign shall be a minimum of 36 inches high and 36 inches wide. The letters and/or numbers shall be a minimum of 4 inches high. This is a performance-based standard that may be modified by the Fire Marshal's Office to achieve the stated goals of this standard. Existing signage may meet the requirements of this rule.
5. An example of a recommended building identification sign follows:



Section 4. Permit Procedures

- A. The FMO Multi-Unit Gate and Building Identification Permit Application form must be submitted to the FMO and must include a letter of explanation, drawings or plans and application fee.
- B. The permit fee for multi-unit housing gates and signage shall be \$50.00 per complex.
- C. The explanation letter shall include the following:
 - 1. Address of the property
 - 2. Key Map location
 - 3. Name of the property or complex
 - 4. Contact or manager name
 - 5. Phone number and email address (if available)
 - 6. Summary description of the work to be approved
 - 7. Location and type of gates used (automatic, sliding/retracting, manual etc.)
 - 8. Location and operation of the manual override or fail-safe system
 - 9. Location of the EAAP
 - 10. Description of building identification signage including proposed background and letter colors
 - 11. Any other significant information
- D. A drawing plan or understandable sketch of the gates/entry shall also be submitted and include the following:
 - 1. Overall drawing of the primary entrance gates
 - 2. Width of the gates
 - 3. Type of gate operation (swing, slide etc.) and the direction of operation
 - 4. Distance from public road to the gate(s)
 - 5. Location of the reader/gate control panel (card reader, key pad, telephone entry, etc.) and measurements in relation to gates and public road
 - 6. Location of EAAP and measurements in relation to reader/gate control panel and gates
 - 7. Location of manual override or fail-safe system and measurements in relation to EAAP reader/gate control panel, gates and public road
 - 8. Location of devices that operates vehicular gates by means of pulleys, arms, chains etc.
- E. An on-site inspection of the entry system and signage will be scheduled and provided by the HCFMO after review of submitted information. A permit will be provided upon successful compliance. *A new permit must be obtained before a change in the gated Multi-Unit Housing Project's construction, location, or ownership that affects emergency response access or building identification.*

SAMPLE LETTER OF PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

**Winchester Chateaux Gated Apartment
13212 Golden Drive
Houston, TX. 77070**

December 24, 2005

Harris County Fire Marshal's Office
2318 Atascocita Road
Humble, TX. 77396

Concerning Gated Apartment Inspections:

Enclosed you will find the application for a Fire and Life Safety Inspection and a check in the amount of \$50.00.

Address of property: 13212 Golden Drive; Houston, TX. 77070

Key map location: 368Y

Name of property: Winchester Chateaux

Management company name: Crest Management

Contact name: Jane Doe (Property Manager)

Phone: 555-555-5555

Description of work to be approved: Inspection of the entry gates, EAAP devices, locks and entrance driveways.

Location and type of gates used: Code Entry Sliding/or Retracting Cantilever Gate, No Code Required Exit Sliding/or Retracting Cantilever Gate, and all other gates are chained and/or Knox Padlock Swinging Gates. All of the gates measure from at least 14 feet to 14 feet 5 inches with the curb-to-curb measurements of 26 feet 9.5 inches. Refer to sketch attached.

Location and operation of manual override systems: Opening the lock and the box mounted on the gate and pulling the cord to break the chain can open the gates due to power failures.

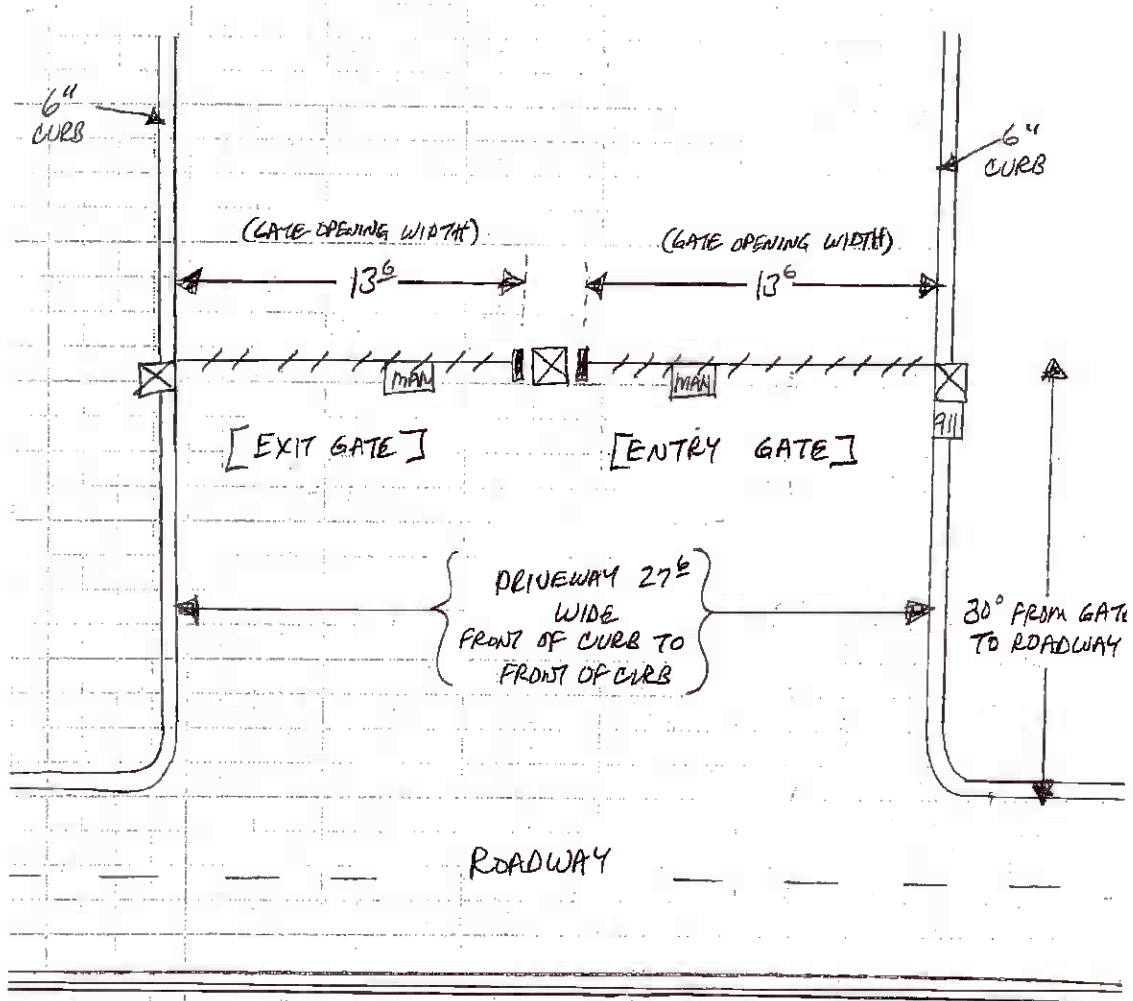
Location of EAAP: The EAAP is located in the entrance gate driveway, approximately 79 feet 8 inches from Golden Drive, approximately 15 inches from the Cantilever gate, 13 feet from the gate access keypad, on the left side, and mounted on a pole 5 feet from the ground.

Description of building identification: Each building is clearly marked with signs that are 24 inches wide and 36 inches tall. The background is dark green with 5 inch high numbers in white. The sign shows the building number located above the unit numbers in that building.

Any other significant information: None

Sincerely,

SAMPLE OF GATE DESCRIPTION



SAMPLE OF COMBINATION EXIT/ENTRY GATES* AND DESIGNATED DRIVEWAY DIAGRAM

LEGEND:

⊠ - 6" POST

MAN - MANUAL OVERRIDE
CABLE BOX WITH
PADLOCK (OR KNOX LOCK)

-----⊠----- - SLIDING GATE

911 - 911" BOX WITH SWITCH - SECURED BY KNOX PADLOCK
(KEY TO MANUAL OVERRIDE LOCK INSIDE)

* ELECTRONICALLY
CONTROLLED
ACCESS GATES

**Step-by-Step Procedures
For
Gated Apartment, Town Home or Condominium**

- STEP 1 -** Review the instruction packet. Also refer to drawings, examples and pictures on the Fire Marshal's website.
- STEP 2 -** Request and obtain an inspection application and Knox Box order form from the Fire Marshal's Office.
- STEP 3 -** Consider consulting an access gate company before ordering any KNOX device. Order and include payment for the appropriate number and type of device(s) from the KNOX company directly.
- STEP 4 -** Prominently display the required building identification signs.
- STEP 5 -** Upon receipt of the devices from KNOX, about 2-3 weeks following the received order, install all the devices.
- STEP 6 -** Prepare and compile the required documents itemized in Section 4 of the instruction packet. Provide it to the inspector on the date the inspection is conducted. Failure to do so will result in inspection disapproval and necessitate a second inspection and fee.
- STEP 7 -** Call your local Volunteer Fire Department to schedule a visit. Fire personnel will make arrangements to secure-lock your KNOX devices and padlocks.
- STEP 8 -** Return the completed inspection application with the required fee.
- STEP 9 -** Upon receiving the application, a fire inspector from the Fire Marshal's Office will call within 15 working days to schedule an inspection date.
- STEP 10 -** On date of the inspection, provide the required documentation to the fire inspector. The inspector will drive and walk the property to ensure proper building signage. Upon completion, an approval or disapproval letter (stating any corrective action necessary) will be mailed within 2-3 working days.



HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

M. S. Montgomery
Fire Marshal

Fire and Life Safety Inspection Application

Please mail or deliver the completed application, a copy of your license (if licensed by a State licensing agency) and payment. Payment must be exact cash, Money Order or Cashiers Check. Sorry, no personal or company checks accepted.

Make fees payable to Harris County Fire Marshal's Office

Please complete all requested information in the box below

Please check one of the following:

- ☐ New Facility/First Inspection
- ☐ Annual Inspection (Enclose a copy of your current State License from the licensing agency)
- ☐ Re-inspection (*applies ONLY to disapprovals and temporary/conditional approvals*)

Business/Facility Name: _____

Address: _____ Key Map (if known): _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Mailing Address (if different): _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Contact Person: _____ Phone Numbers: Phone _____ - _____ - _____

Cellular _____ - _____ - _____

Other _____ - _____ - _____

License Information (if applicable):

Type of Occupancy licensed for: _____ Number of persons licensed for: _____

Licensing Agency: _____

Licensing Representative/Contact Name: _____ Phone: _____ - _____ - _____

Licensing Agency Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Fees:

Inspection fee (refer to fee schedule): \$ _____

Additional Fees * (optional, refer to fee schedule): \$ _____

Total you are submitting: \$ _____

* We strive to accommodate all special handling requests. If we cannot perform the inspection within the specified time period, you may request a refund of the special handling fee.



HARRIS COUNTY FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

2318 Atascocita Rd. · Humble, Texas 77396 · (281) 436-8000 · Fax (281) 436-8005

Inspection Checklist – GATED / Multi-Unit Housing

Complex Name _____

Address _____ Key Map _____

On-Site Contact _____ Phone _____

Management Company _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Property Owner _____ Phone _____

Address _____

In accordance with the Local Government Code 352.111-120 regarding standards set by Harris County Commissioner's Court regulating emergency vehicles access to and identification of buildings on a multi-unit housing project:

- The project must meet all applicable fire and life safety regulations.
- The inspection is subject to expiration based upon the provisions as stated in 352.118.
- Further inspections may be required dependent upon changes in vehicular access, pedestrian access and/or building identification.

In accordance with Local Government Code, Chapter 352.016, all fire and life safety inspections in unincorporated Harris County must be performed by a FMO fire inspector. The Fire & Life Safety Inspection Standard is the "International Fire Code, 2006 edition".

This checklist is provided as a service to help the complex maintain a fire safe environment. The information is based on the Harris County Fire & Life Safety Inspection Standard. This standard may be different from building/fire codes in cities or other jurisdictions. Use of this checklist by others **DOES NOT** substitute for a required fire & life safety inspection, performed by a FMO fire inspector.

FIRE ALARM SYSTEM

SPRINKLER SYSTEM

No.	Item	Code Ref.	OK	Not OK	N/A
1	Building signage is: (A) Prominently displayed (B) A minimum of 4" high letters/numbers (C) Easily visible from the driving areas on the property (D) Letters/numbers are in contrasting color from background	IFC 505.1 LGC 352.116			
2	Designated emergency access driveway with gates has: (A) Two-way access width of 28 feet, back of curb to back of curb. (B) Each driveway measures minimum of 12 feet 6 inches wide, front of curb to front of curb (C) One-way access width of 14 feet, back of curb to back of curb (D) Vertical clearance of 13 feet 6 inches	IFC 503.2 LGC 352.115			
3	The designated access gate is located at least 30 feet from the roadway.	IFC 503.2			
4	A KNOX device located at each vehicular gate (or pedestrian gate as required) and if a pedestrian gate exists, it shall have a Knox device installed and is located within sight or in close proximity of a vehicular gate. The accessibility to the Knox device is outside the gate keyed to countywide code.	IFC 506.1 & 503.6 LGC 352.114			
5	Electronically controlled vehicular access gate(s) operable/ maintained via a: (A) A KNOX key switch (B) "911" type box housing a switch to open the gate(s) with the box secured by a KNOX padlock. Gate remains open until switch is manually re-set.	IFC 506.1.1 LGC 352.114			
6	Manual override for each electronically controlled vehicular access gates must: (A) Be located outside each gate (B) Secured by a KNOX device (C) Capable of operating under all conditions and at all times	IFC 503.6 LGC 352.114			
7	Manual vehicular gates may be secured by: (A) A chain or fold-down hinge with a Knox padlock (B) A chain or fold down hinge with a generic padlock(s), provided a "911" type box is located outside the gate; the box is secured with a KNOX padlock; and the key in the "911" type box unlocks all generic padlocks affixed to that gate.	IFC 503.6 LGC 352.114			
8	A description, on letterhead stationary, including all eleven (11) items specified in Section 4. Permit Procedures, Paragraph C of the regulations. A property representative must sign the letter.	AHJ			
9	A drawing or sketch of the access gates/entry to include all eight (8) items as specified in Section 4. Permit Procedures, Paragraph D of the regulations.	AHJ			
10	Submit application and appropriate fee (when ready for inspection).	AHJ			

2318 Atascocita Rd · Humble, Texas 77396 · (281) 436-8000 · Fax (281) 436-8005

REQUIRED CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Date _____